

HIST 402/802 (WMNS 402/802) Sexuality in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century America

In recent decades, the study of human sexuality has emerged as among the most vibrant areas of scholarly inquiry, one which cuts across academic disciplines. Yet, for as knowledgeable as we are indeed becoming in this important area of inquiry, many are still surprised to discover that sexuality itself has a history all its own, one which bears little resemblance to nostalgic (“such things didn’t happen in my day”) reconstructions of the past. Consequently, one of the primary goals of this upper-division course is to assess sexuality’s larger historical sweep, one which is not simply a tale of the march forward of “progress” (from the dark days of repression to today’s supposed tolerance and sexual liberation) but rather something much more complex.

Sexuality’s larger historical eras therefore—including, though certainly not limited to, the Age of Victorianism, the New Morality, as well as the Sexual Revolutions of the 1960s—constitute the course’s larger narrative framework. However, three topics in particular will serve as the course’s driving focus: the history of birth control (contraception and abortion); the history of homosexuality and gay and lesbian identities, communities, and practices; and the intersections between sex, art, and the media.

Please be advised that the reading and writing for this class is heavy. Requirements for the course include: extensive reading of primary and secondary sources (including several full-length books), several papers (both formal and informal), quizzes, an in-class written exam, and active participation in classroom discussion. Graduate students will be expected to fulfill several additional requirements.

This course can be applied to the LGBTQ/Sexuality Studies minor.